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Viewing cable 08BEIRUT237, LEBANON: THEORIES ABOUT MUGHNIEH'S ASSASSINATION

If you are new to these pages, please read an introduction on the [structure of a cable](#) as well as how to [discuss them](#) with others. See also the [FAQs](#)

Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#08BEIRUT237**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08BEIRUT237	2008-02-14 16:56	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET//NOFORN	Embassy Beirut

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/16545>
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SUBJECT: LEBANON: THEORIES ABOUT MUGHNIEH'S ASSASSINATION

REF: TD 314-011416-08

Classified By: DCM William Grant for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Two days after the February 12 Damascus car bomb attack that killed senior Hizballah commander Imad Mughnieh, theories abound in Beirut on who was behind the assassination and why. The timing of the killing also cannot be ignored, occurring just two days before the third anniversary of the assassination of former PM Rafiq Hariri and a March 14 commemorative rally in downtown Beirut. With tensions in Lebanon already high -- and both sides hardening their positions -- due to the ongoing political impasse, many Lebanese are predicting that Lebanon will pay the price for Mughnieh's death.

¶2. (C) The assassination of a figure who was an icon for the Lebanese Shia resistance, but one of the U.S.' and Israel's most sought after terrorist fugitives, raises questions about who wanted Mughnieh dead now, and why. While most regional

finger pointing is directed at Israel, with the U.S. coming a close second, several local political and intelligence sources believe the Syrian regime had good reasons to rid itself of Mughnieh.

¶3. (C) As the Hizballah controlled southern suburbs of Beirut are in deep mourning for the February 14 burial of one of their own, reaction from members of the pro-government March 14 bloc ranges from private satisfaction to the sober condolence statement issued by Future Movement leader Saad Hariri. However, the possibility that March 14 could have been involved has also surfaced in the rumor mill. There is widespread concern that retaliation will not be good for Lebanon. End summary.

CONCURRENT MAJORITY AND
OPPOSITION MEMORIALS

¶4. (C) On a dreary and wet February 14 afternoon Hizballah buried its hero, Imad Mughnieh, in a mass funeral service that included speeches by Hizballah SYG Hassan Nasrallah and Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki. A few hours earlier, and just a short drive from Mughnieh's funeral, the pro-government March 14 bloc held a mass rally in Martyrs' Square commemorating the third anniversary of the assassination of former PM Rafiq Hariri. The mass gathering of March 14 supporters (claims of attendance ranged from 100,000 to a million supporters) was an attempt to re-energize the majority's base and regain the political initiative against the opposition. Nasrallah vowed "open war" with the "Zionists," pledging to carry out operations against Israel outside of Lebanon in retaliation for Mughnieh's death. The speechmaking at the peaceful March 14 rally focused on the need for Lebanese "consensus and agreement," and the immediate election of a president. Among the many speakers, only Druse leader Walid Jumblatt came out tough on Syria and its opposition allies, vowing that Lebanon will not be "handed to Damascus or to the black Syrian-Iranian world."

MARCH 14'S PUBLIC CONDEMNATION:
MORE THAN CROCODILE TEARS?

¶5. (C) On February 13, March 14 leader MP Saad Hariri publicly denounced Mughnieh's assassination and offered his condolences to Hizballah SYG Hassan Nasrallah. In an LBCI television interview the same day, Hariri agreed with Hizballah's accusation that Israel was behind the killing. However, Hariri also hinted at a Syrian role when he noted that Mughnieh was killed in Damascus, near an Iranian school, and in an area controlled by Syrian intelligence.

¶6. (C) The day of the assassination. March 14 SYG Fares Suaid spoke of Mughnieh's death as though it were a lesson for Hizballah. Namely, Hizballah should realize that its only protector and guarantor is the Lebanese state and the Lebanese army and not/not the Syrian security apparatus and its arsenal.

¶7. (C) Meanwhile Druse leader and March 14 member Walid Jumblatt, believes that either the Israelis, for obvious reasons, or the Syrians, for reasons unknown, eliminated Mughnieh. In any case, Jumblatt, candid as usual, called Mughnieh's death "good news."

¶8. (C) A number of majority politicians, including former Lebanese Ambassador to the U.S. Simon Karam and National Liberal Party leader Dory Chamoun, believe Syria liquidated Mughnieh as a "gift to the Americans." Both hoped that the deal will not turn out to be at Lebanon's expense.

¶9. (C) Minister of the Interior Hassan Sabaa told Ambassador that he was relieved that Mughnieh was not killed on Lebanese soil, otherwise March 14 would have been accused of conspiring with Israel against Hizballah. Sabaa, undecided as to the identity of the perpetrator, commented it

could be Syria wanting to send a message to Hizballah or to the U.S., or even the result of a split within Hizballah. He, too, expressed concern that Lebanon could pay a price in case the message was directed to the U.S. as reminder that the U.S should deal with Syria over the presidential election and Hizballah.

¶10. (C) Another theory in the Beirut rumor mill has it that the Saudis and the Hariri family collaborated with Syrian Sunni jihadis to deal a blow to the opposition and their allies Syria and Iran. This idea is based on previous allegations that Saad Hariri and Saudi Arabia were involved in arming Sunni militants in an effort to counter Hizballah.

ISF OFFICIALS SEE BASHAR'S HAND

¶11. (S/NF) Mid-level officials from Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF) told emboffs they believe Syrian forces affiliated with President Bashar al-Asad may be responsible for the assassination in an effort to force a compromise in the ongoing political impasse by lessening pressure on Syria (Ref A). The officials further speculated that the attack would be a severe blow to Hizballah, leading to extensive confusion and lack of cohesion. They attribute their assessment to alleged tension between al-Asad and his military intelligence chief Asef Shawkat resulting from a disagreement between the spouses of the two men. The ISF officials further noted that al-Asad was becoming increasingly independent, sidelining previously trusted advisors such as Shawkat.

SOME OPPOSITION OBSERVERS
DOUBT ISRAELI "GUILT"

¶12. (C) While most observers in the Lebanese opposition rallied behind Hizballah's accusation against Israel, Aoun-bloc MP Ghassan Mokheiber noted privately to emboffs that it was bizarre that Mughnieh was killed after stepping out of a Syrian intelligence office, adding that Mughnieh's death represented a big challenge for Hizballah. Mokheiber commented that the days ahead would probably reveal the nature of a possible "deal" made.
SISON